

A PARTY FOR THE GIRLS: SIX STORIES, by H. E. Bates. New York: New Directions, 1988. 243 pp. \$10.95 paper.

Slowly but surely, the work of H. E. Bates (1905-74), English short-story writer, is being introduced to more and more U. S. readers. He is little known on this side of the Atlantic, but publication projects such as this New Directions compilation of six Bates stories are helping to make an increasing number of short-story enthusiasts aware of this man's exceptional talent.

These six longish stories were culled from various collections over Bates's long writing career. In terms of "well-knownness," they range from an acknowledged masterpiece—"The Mill," namely—to other stories that will be less familiar even to experienced Bates readers—the title story, for instance.

Anyone who has had the pleasure of a Bates story tends to remember him for three reasons. First, his exquisite style: his elegant but never prissy nor precious flow of words, in one beautiful sentence after another. Second, his considerable ability to conjure sensuous atmospheres—specifically, the tension, the steaminess, between a man and a woman aroused by each other. Third, his deft characterizations.

These traits are on perfect display in the story "Summer in Salandar." It's about a young English shipping clerk stationed in a tropical port deserted for the summer. He's bored, he's jaded. Then into port sails a young woman who, despite its being off-season, wants to see the sights—including a several-days mule ride high up into the surrounding hills. The

shipping clerk gets up on his journey and accompanies her, and thus himself growing infatuated with her and resenting the presence of a third party, the cook they brought with them. Eventually, the clerk sheds the cook's company and has the woman alone. But then he falls and injures himself and must be rescued by people from town. End of story.

As Bates develops the narrative structure of "Summer in Salandar," he documents the mounting body heat amid the rising weather heat. At one point:

The track widened. She reined the mule and waited for him. Then as she turned the mule half-face to him he noticed the shape of her body, pressed heavily across the dark animal flanks. She had ridden up in a sleeveless thin white dress, the skirt of which was drawn up beyond her knees. He had never been able to make up his mind how old she was and now, in her excitement, her skirt drawn up above bare smooth legs, her eyes enormously shining, he thought she seemed much younger than she had done down in the scorching, withering period of the *leste* [the burning wind from the northeast], in the town. She seemed to have left her hostile restlessness behind.

"Summer in Salandar" is exemplary in showing Bates a master of strong, rich sentences; a master of lustful atmosphere that never gets soggy or ridiculous; a master of characterization rendered economically but with fine shading. All the stories in this collection demonstrate, with variations in sharpness, these estimable characteristics.